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ABSTRACT

American schools have recently been exposed to a grave cycle of educational distress advanced by both internal and external constituencies for a variety of reasons, which range from political correctness to vouchers. Responses by educational administrators appeared to have found solace in the overt practice of deliberate inaction rather than through legitimate leadership practices. Deliberate inaction has advanced "feeble leadership" as an acceptable means of educational direction, which has stalled school effectiveness. The paper outlines five leadership strategies to replace indecisive stalling: knowledge-based leadership patterns; preferential treatment for excellent performance; valid and reliable decision making; consequence-based responsibility; and proactive leadership behavior. One table is included. (Contains 14 references.) (LMI)

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Knowledge Based Leadership for Cycles of Culturally Induced Educational Distress

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To
University of Wisconsin - Superior
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Abstract

American schools of recent have been exposed to a grave cycle of educational distress advanced by both internal and external constituencies for a variety of reasons ranging from political correctness to vouchers. Response by educational administrators, unfortunately, appeared to have found solace in the overt practice of deliberate inaction as opposed to legitimate leadership practices. That deliberate inaction advanced feeble leadership as an acceptable means of educational direction catalyzing the indecisive stalling of effective schools. In response to such indecisive stalling by educational administrators five educational leadership strategies were postulated which included: (1) Knowledge Based Leadership Patterns; (2) Preferential Treatment for Excellent Performance; (3) Valid and Reliable Decision-making; (4) Consequence-based Responsibility; and, (5) Proactive Leadership Behavior.

Knowledge Based Leadership for Cycles of Culturally Induced Educational Distress

American public schools have long been a mirror of American society. As American society has evolved so has its schools. In 1992, Sykes described the United States as having evolved to a "No Fault - No Pain Society" where "the national anthem has become the whine" with "students quickly learning the protocols of power ... can be gained most efficiently through being a victim" [pps. 21, 15, 12]. Wildavsky (1991) calculated that if one added up all individuals that determined oneselves as wronged minorities, such would sum to 374 percent of the American population.

Given such it is obvious that the twenty-first century certainly possesses a solid foundation for a continued cycle of culturally induced educational distress. Sykes (1992) defined a "victimization" as, "a generalized cultural impulse to deny personal responsibility and to obsess on the grievances of the insatiable self" (p.22). These culturally induced threats to effective American education range from political correctness and learner "victimization" to private school vouchers and deliberate absence of educational leadership. Through diversity, "victims" seem to reside at opposite poles based on their oppression. In actual terms "victims" of all kinds are crowded together at one end of the societal continuum. It is in reality, however, that the "victim" and the moderate who are poles apart and never meet culturally (Hoffer, 1951).

The recent axiom, "I do not know the key to success, but I know the key to failure is trying to please everyone," has definite application to educational leadership practices in response to the culturally imposed cycles of distress that have distinguished the decade of the 1990's for schools. To suggest, however, that attempts to "please everyone" via deliberate inaction is indeed a leadership strategy is itself oxymoronic. In troubled educational times there exists a definitive need for, as opposed to an absence of, leadership.

The current cycle of cynical cultural distress in American education is unlike any of the past due in large part to informational technology. Reluctantly education leaders cling for dear life to the archaic societal icon of the swinging "pendulum" in a melancholy craving that it will again return to a more favorable alignment toward education. Nonetheless what has replaced the "pendulum," is the "lightswitch." This new "lightswitch" societal icon is dramatically different than that of the "pendulum" because it: (1) is an unstable, yet relative position that can be turned on and off with tremendous ease and speed; (2) represents a binary response in lieu of a continuum of cultural responses; (3) has no moderating temporal influence; (4) is not responsive to rational momentum; and, (5) can readily be positioned in multiple bi-polar settings within a single environment.

Yet, many educational administrators view themselves as "band-aid" transitional leaders hoping for a returning swing of the "pendulum" to a more conducive treatment of public schools. The reality of American society, however, is that it throws away "band-aids." Thus, if effective

schools are the nation's goal it is critical that educational leaders avoid at all costs transitional, deliberate inaction while waiting for the "pendulum" to again return to a positive regard for public education. It likely will never reoccur in this multicultural generation as the "lightswitch" has replaced the "pendulum" making educational leadership often an electrifying experience.

Given the dramatic change in American society from an action oriented product based culture to that of a bi-polar victimization ethos, the causal impact of reactive deliberate inaction disguised as a form of leadership in its schools should come as no amazement. The real stupefaction is the accepted leadership notion that failure to lead via deliberate inaction is equal and non-threatening. It is in fact this very politically correct context within schools that is even more devastating to learners and the educational process than deliberate, yet ineffectual, leadership behaviors.

The need for responsive educational leadership emerges as the critical element to genuinely benefit the "victims" as opposed to a mere recognition of the spurious moral righteousness contentions held by them. Responsive educational leaders must move beyond *ex post facto* theoretical analysis of leadership tactics into *apriori* application of a knowledge based leadership strategy. To that end it is suggested that educational leaders in culturally induced cycles of educational distress negate deliberate inaction in lieu of five proscribed leadership strategies to

provide both equal and fair treatment of the entire school constituency resulting in effective schools despite contraindicated cultural instigation.

Knowledge Based Leadership Patterns

Simply, a knowledge base is an amalgamation of theory, research and wisdoms of practice. It uses research to serve as a uniform resource linkage of respective theory to its inherent wisdoms of practice. A legitimate knowledge base is no more characterized by solely static theory than by a tradition of misbegotten practice. It is a vibrant nebula of the professional intellect that distinguishes knowledge from information so as to temper application with empiricism in a real, not rhetorical manner.

Whereas knowledge *itself* may have been power in the early twentieth century, knowledge *about* knowledge represents the true power for the twenty-first century educational leader. This equates to the need for educational administrators creating and advancing a professional knowledge base of educational leadership early in one's career with continued dynamic formulation throughout its lifecycle. One's knowledge base must clearly present the real, essential leadership that will emanate from an educational administrator in lieu of the rhetorical description of those qualities (Galluzzo and Pankratz, 1990).

Responsive leadership actions in culturally induced educational cycles of distress depend not merely upon the facts of a situation but also on the knowledge base held by the decision-maker. Social positivism (Halfpenny, 1982) postulated that objective analysis of one educational

issue need not predetermine positions on others. Inherent in positivistic educational leadership knowledge base interactions is the prospect of not only multi-variate analysis of competing culture but equifinality based solution as well.

Preferential Treatment for Excellent Performance

Learned self-helplessness has replaced success as primary motivation for attention, treatment and reinforcement in today's schools. It is not a hiearchial characteristic but rather a cultural one which has infused all dimensions and levels of the educational process from post-graduate programs to kindergarten. The politically correct culture dictates that all individuals are to be respected as "excellent" when simple mathematics clearly disproves the notion. For in fact, if everyone were "excellent," everyone would truly be "average" and there could be no genuine standard of excellent performance.

At the root of this flawed multicultural ideal is common sense ignorance of the difference between equality and fairness. Equal and fair are two distinctly different educational concepts moreover highly interactive with each other. Simply defined, equality refers to collective opportunity whereas fairness refers to individual need. Thus, all educational constituencies must have the same educational opportunity (i.e. equal) to receive what is individually and educationally needed (i.e. fair). This does not translate into every educational constituent receiving

what every other constituent receives whether or not it was needed (i.e. the same).

The cultural induced notion of "sameness" inaccurately espoused as equality by has a debilitating effect upon schools. This is especially pronounced during cycles of educational distress when the schools are highly susceptible to external cultural forces. True effect of this flawed perspective is a standardized educational treatment so originally despised and challenged by the "victims" of education. Precisely what shall be provided in response to those culturally demanded needs is its antithesis - a sameness for all except under a different label whether or not one needed the treatment. As contemplative example, is mandatory multicultural education for all learners truly any different than mandatory traditional history education when everyone receives the same whether or not one needs such?

Resultantly at the time educational leaders are being held to task to increase the level of excellence in schools in troubled times it is vital that leadership behavior redirect itself to preferential treatment for legitimate educational excellence to all constituencies whether learner, teacher or community based. Such a lesson may be obtained from school athletic teams where there is a collective effort for excellence that affords individual participant involvement based on need and positive preferential treatment for excellent performance. Interestingly in school athletics, there also appears to be: a significant absence of "victim" based mindsets; accommodation of an immense array of ability and skill; and a socio-

economic variance that is capable of coming together for a collective goal or mutual benefit. Further, athletic teams have the capability to retain a sense of community despite cycles of distress (i.e. loosing) in a sense of individual fairness that the school itself as the host is largely incapable of replicating itself.

A major point of consideration therefore for the educational leader is not to ascertain *why* preferential treatment for performance has possibility during cycles of culturally induced distress, but rather, *how* it can be efficaciously utilized. There are many archetypes available for analysis ranging from geopolitical (e.g. fall of the U.S.S.R.) to corporate (Child, 1975) that can provide the educational leader with a diversified means to consider leadership delivery of preferential treatment for performance. To derive the direction required to advance beyond an culturally induced cycle of educational distress makes it readily apparent that such can only be achieved by excellence of performance. Applied behavioral analysis provides a plethora of data that performance is directly commensurate to individual, not group reinforcement. Objective examination of performance reinforcement patterns would reveal that preferential treatment for individual performance does not constitute discriminatory treatment against all others.

In a nutshell that illustrates the need for educational leaders to employ preferential treatment for genuine excellent performance as a means to break the culturally induced cycle of educational distress. It does not, however, permit license to punish non-excellent performance

given punishment's primary value is informing one as *how not* to perform as opposed *how to* perform. To evolve from any distress cycle leaders need to know, understand and appreciate that performance based consequences especially in advancement terms is only possible from the presence of excellent performance and **not** merely the absence of mediocre performance.

Valid and Reliable Decision-making

Multi-media technology has created a black hole between knowledge and information with research being the most viable means to link both. Research continues, however, to not be readily used by educational leaders in resultant part that they do not know of the existence of research findings whose decision-making implications are self-evident (Zaltman, Florio, Sikorski, 1977) for constituencies. Absence of implicated linkages between information and knowledge catalyzes the necessity of research to generate valid and reliable information for knowledgeable decision-making. Clark and Guba (1975) described this as a *configurational perspective* where valid and reliable knowledge production and use can create a linking system among differing educational constituencies.

Cohen (1989) stated "the relationship between knowledge and action decisions is a complex one, that knowledge is always limited, and uncertainty always exists" (p.33). Yet, knowledge production and use is dependent upon a research utilization process (Rogers, 1962). It is

essential therefore that educational administrators engage educational research to maximize the validity and reliability of leadership knowledge while minimizing uncertainty in decision-making when it is likely that the cultural distribution variance on any troublesome issue will be 49% pro versus 51% con or vice versa. Even more frustrating are the "lightswitch" cultural constituencies that can immediately reverse polarity necessitating valid and reliable knowledge as the loci for any educational leadership decisions.

Obtaining valid and reliable knowledge as a basis for educational leadership decisions may have been a luxury in "pendular" times but it is a critical mass for "lightswitch" times. Inherent is a requirement that a distinction be made between factual knowledge and value judgments held and advanced by cultural constituencies championing a particular motive, most notably during cycles of educational distress. Often the only moderating stanchion available to educational leaders during the emotional upheavals activated by various constituents' apostolic bi-polar penury is valid and reliable information that only systematic inquiry (i.e. research) can afford. Valid and reliable decision-making does not assure the educational leader of universally agreeable constituencies in an educational arena rampant with culturally diverse bi-polar self-gratifying entitlement desires, but it does serve to establish an equal process that reflects a fair purpose.

Consequence Based Responsibility

A trite phrase oft espoused by politicians of late is, "I accept full responsibility for (i.e. whatever)," on a host of issues ranging from military deployment to balanced budgets - all done so in a knowingly complete vacuum of personal subjugation to the authentic consequences of their rhetoric. For example, were politicians required to actually engage in the consequences of the same military action they "accept full responsibility for" (e.g. direct line of enemy gunfire) there likely would be immediate world peace. Educational administrators, infamous for patterning the successful consequence-free responsibility they see so effectively modeled by incumbent politicians, have embraced the tactic as well in response to culturally induced political correctness. Simply stated, educational administrators like politicians fearful of political retribution, are typically indeed only third party facilitators to consequence-based responsibility among factional cultural confrontationists.

The ubiquitous consequence-free responsibility acceptance by an educational leader generally occurs only when there is a conflict among factional cultural constituencies that becomes public. Settings of this nature have been identified as confrontation designs (Schmuck and Runkel,1994; Walton, 1969). Similarity between consequence-free responsibility and confrontation design rests with the educational leader being a third, not principal party. The difference, however, between the two is that confrontation designs require the principal parties - not third

party educational leaders- to assume genuine consequence-based responsibility for action.

It is then literally impossible for the true educational leader to accept consequence-free responsibility for any educational action. Educational leaders, regardless of distress or prosperity, should never accept consequence-free responsibility for any event or reason. On the other hand this strategy does not permit capricious fault assignment to other parties or cultural constituencies. Should, however, the educational administrator be a primary party in a confrontation it is then one's leadership obligation to: (1) initiate resolution; (2) accept consequence-based responsibility; and, (3) facilitate follow-through behavior.

Proactive Leadership Behavior

Proactive leadership is by its nature intrinsic whereas reactive leadership is extrinsic. In most distress cycles there exists the appearance that culturally reactive, extrinsic forces are dominant over proactive, intrinsic forces. In reality this alignment is reversed albeit deceptively obscured to the educational leader. Further, it is precisely in the cycle of distress that proactive, intrinsic relationships with educational environmental elements is most powerful. Unfortunately this is a rather elusive concept for educational leaders to accept let alone embrace.

Not to be confused with contingency theory (Hanson, 1979), proactive educational leadership is not driven by present situational response but rather by the interaction of past wisdoms of practice

-anchored by knowledge base- and systemic speculation of future events. It requires anticipatory interdependent forethought with the foregone. The strength of proactive leadership is its long term power to span both the past and future whereas contingency leadership power is applicable to present, short-term situations.

Initially or early in educational distress cycles leaders may wish to employ contingency leadership strategies. They are, however, incapable of sustaining an educational momentum through an era of culturally troubled times or duress given their anaerobic qualities. Neither contingency or proactive leadership is reactive. Therefore it is the astute educational leader, confronted by even the most intense cultural induced cycle of educational distress, who parsimoniously uses short-term contingency leadership tactics within a well defined long-term proactive leadership strategy.

Summary

During cycles of educational distress school leaders must knowingly align oneself so as to observe the educational system as one that extends beyond the physical boundaries of the building or district. As suggested by Eisner (1994) the educational leader must know what is educationally significant in order to give proper direction to analysis to result in leadership conditions will permit the educational process to thrive despite adversity. In such a context, effective educational leaders must actively engage leadership behaviors (see figure 1) in as much as

effective teachers engage pedagogy. After all, it is the school that represents the essential unit of educational excellence despite societal inclinations otherwise.

Table 1. **Continuum of Behaviors for Knowledge Based Leadership in Cycles of Cultural Induced Educational Distress.**

LEADERSHIP	DELIBERATE INACTION
Intellectual Discourse	Political Correctness
Knowledge Base	Traditional Practice Base
Problem Solution	Problem Description
Objective Focus	Subjective Focus
Obligation Motive	Want Motive
Fair Treatment	Equal Treatment
Prevailing Nature	Survival Nature
Deductive Logic	Inductive Logic
Management of Control	Discipline to Control
Organizational Stability	Personal Security
Decision Making	Indecisive Stalling
Reality Substructure	Rhetorical Substructure
Thinking Foundation	Feeling Foundation
Risk Free Idea Generation	Neo-ideal Intolerance
Genuine Reinforcement	Artificial Reinforcement
Consequential Responsibility	Result Free Responsibility
Factual Pursuit	Opinion Driven
Responsibility Orientation	Fault Assignment Determination
"How" Alignment	"Why" Alignment
Intrinsic Convergence	Extrinsic Conveyance

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